



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Helping People Help The Land

January/February 2013 Issue No. 19



The Reverchon Naturalist

Recognizing the work of French botanist Julien Reverchon, who began collecting throughout the North-Central Texas area in 1876, and all the botanists/naturalists who have followed ...

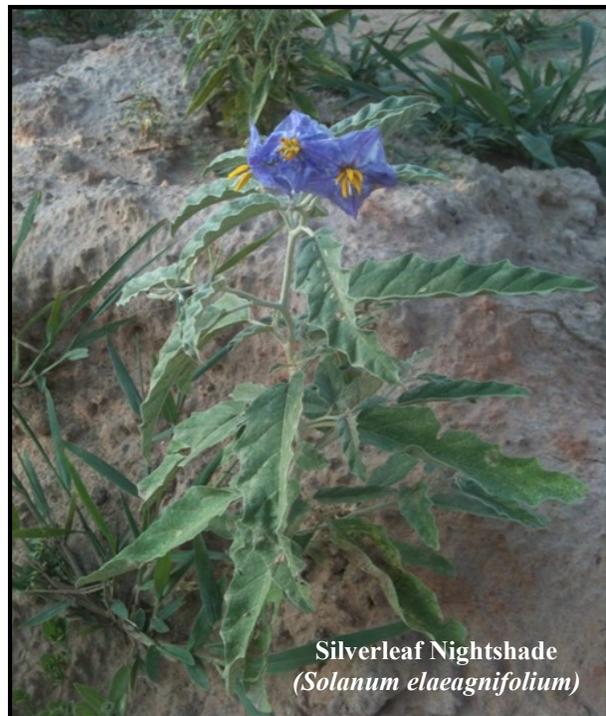
Silverleaf Nightshade

*Story by Kelli McClelland
NRCS District Conservationist
Belton, Texas*

I had topsoil brought in for my raised bed garden. Thanks to the topsoil, I have had the pleasure of pulling a lot of silverleaf nightshade, *Solanum elaeagnifolium*. With the drought and reduction of pasture production it's a serious weed to contend with. Silverleaf nightshade is also called tomato weed, white horsenettle, prairie berry, silverleaf nettle, white horsenettle, purple nightshade, silver nightshade, and white nightshade. Silverleaf nightshade is a perennial plant from the tomato family Solanaceae. It is a 1 to 3-foot tall erect plant; armed with prickles along the stem and leaves. The silvery gray color is from the hairs that cover leaves and stem. The flower is deep purple to bluish with five petals and yellow stamens in center.

The plant blooms midsummer to frost. Sometimes people confuse western horse nettle with its cousin silverleaf nightshade because of the same purple flower and yellow stamen. Western horsenettle has oval 5-7 lobed leaves and thorns are yellow noticeable on the plant at first sight. Silverleaf nightshade has oblong lance shaped leaves that are alternate, and 5-6 inches long 1-inch wide, the thorns are smaller and not as noticeable. Silverleaf nightshade fruit carries the seed, and is globe shaped and greenish yellow to orange.

The seed pods are held on the plant after frost even after leaves are gone. The plant's water use is low and it prefers full sunlight, and it spreads by roots and seed. The extensive root system can produce multiple stems. Besides in my new garden, silverleaf nightshade is found in crop fields, range land, orchards, road sides, unmanaged places, and disturbed areas. Seed is spread by birds, wind, water and livestock. It is considered a noxious weed in 21 states. *(Continued on page 6)*



Silverleaf Nightshade
(Solanum elaeagnifolium)

Silverleaf nightshade's water use is low and it prefers full sunlight, and spreads by roots and seeds. The extensive root system can produce multiple stems.
(Photo courtesy of Kelli McClelland, USDA-NRCS)

Gambling on a Freeze

This period of warmer than average late winter weather has many plants busting at the bark ready to pop up and begin spring growth, the only problem is that ol' man winter likely still has a surprise for us in the next month or so. Driving around north central Texas the past 10 days reveals many winter forbs being joined by spring forbs and a few shrubs. Everywhere you see an elbowbush, take a moment to notice the tiniest of yellow flowers that are now blooming. Elbowbush is a woody shrub that blooms prior to the emergence of the first leaves.

You begin to notice the golden to yellow glow against the dreary winter landscape and you know that spring is not far away. There are other shrubs that brazenly present their showy flowers for viewing prior to the arrival of leaves. Two that are common in north central Texas include Mexican buckeye and redbud. In the third week of February Rafael Aldrich, an NRCS rangeland management specialist in the Graham field office, and I were standing on a high bluff above the Brazos River in southeastern Young County. Just below us were three buckeye's but they were withholding their pink to purplish-pink blossoms, perhaps needing another week or two to commit bud break and let loose the flowers. Just a few days prior in northern Wise County, I had passed an area known for redbuds but did not see any of the purplish-red flowers, just bare branches holding tight to the buds.

We may be in a rush for spring to get here as soon as possible, but there is time and perhaps more importantly, we should be outside enjoying the nice pre-spring weather and giving thanks for these plants which renews our souls and outlook on life in general. Go out and smell the flowers, enjoy the time spent in the field. After all, a late freeze will quickly fade these early flowers, so beat the gamble and enjoy them now.

DO YOU KNOW THESE PLANTS?



Mexican Buckeye



Elbowbush

SIDEOATS GRAMA

(Bouteloua curtipendula)

Story by Tonoher Johnson, NRCS Soil Conservationist
Cameron, Texas



Sideoats grama is a warm-season, perennial bunchgrass that breaks dormancy in early spring and begins to flower in early summer. It has a bluish-green color, sometimes with a purple cast and cures to a reddish-brown. The flowering stalks can grow up to 24-36 inches tall. The leaves are about 10 - 12 in. long and nearly 1/4-inch wide. The seed-head consists of a large number of oat-like seeds arranged on one side of the stem (It gets its name from the oat-like seeds).



The root system is fairly deep. This feature allows the plant to effectively utilize all available soil moisture. The best identifiers of this plant are the oat-like seeds and the leaf blades that are wide and flat or folded when dry. The leaves are usually smooth facing away from the stem and scabrous (having a rough surface), occasionally pubescent (hairy), along the surface of the margins.

It is found in the mixed grass prairie and although early moisture is important to the survival of seedlings, it is one of the most drought tolerant of the native grasses. It is adapted to a wide range of soils and climate conditions, allowing it to be very versatile in its range of use. This makes it an excellent choice for conservation purposes. It has an assortment of benefits to the environment and our natural resources. To name a few, it provides shelter and food for a num-

ber of wildlife species, erosion control when planted in a mix with other grass species that are adapted to the site on which it is being grown (assisting in soil health), and it produces a grand amount of leafy forage that is loved by all classes of livestock. It remains green later in the fall and usually begins growth in the spring before others. It cures well, and maintains a decent feeding value throughout the year.



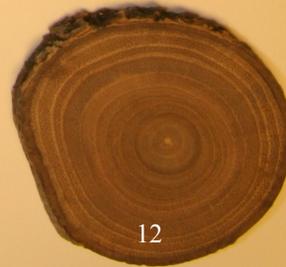
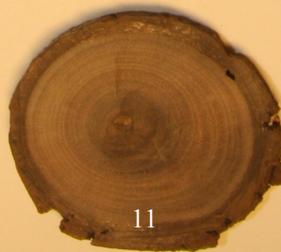
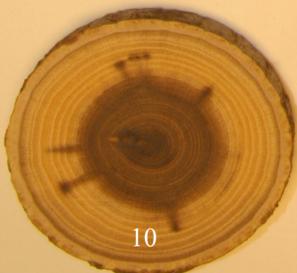
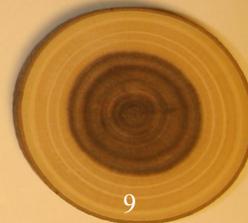
The official state grass of Texas designated in 1971.



Photos Courtesy of Tonoher Johnson, USDA-NRCS

Wooden Nickel Quiz

Identify these wooden nickels cut from trees and shrubs commonly found in the Cross Timbers vegetational region. Thanks to Steve Nelle for supplying a majority these nickels, and to Roger Q. "Jake" Landers for initiating the idea of the nickels. The answers to this quiz can be found on page 6, and the trees and shrubs of the Blackland Prairie and Post Oak Savannah region will featured in the March/April issue.



(Continued on page 6)

Mustang Grape

Story by Rebecca Svoboda
NRCS Soil Conservationist
Granbury, Texas

Mustang grapes are one of those plants that everyone who lives in Texas has heard about. We see them growing along fence lines and hanging from hardwood trees in our windbreaks and along streams. We make jelly and wines with the fruit, but Mustang grape, as with many of our native species, has been used for many different purposes. You never know when you might find an interesting piece of history you didn't know about.

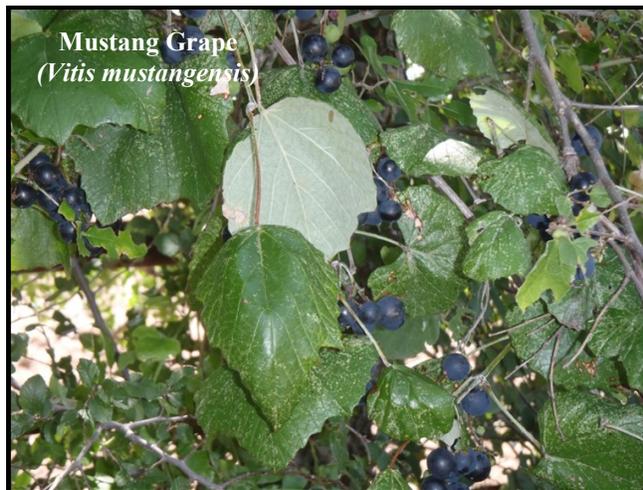
The European wine industry was saved by native Texas grapes. Today almost 70 percent of the world's grapes (dominate species being *Vitis Mustangensis*) originate from Texas due to an outbreak of Phylloxera in Europe that nearly wiped out the wine industry. The native grapes of Texas were discovered to be immune to this pesky aphid (phylloxera). Root stalk was shipped by train to Europe and used to save the wine industry. Our native wildlife can find a use for this plant as well. Turkey, white-tailed deer and many small mammals will utilize the fruit for food as well as use the limbs and foliage for cover.

Mustang grapes are usually seen growing along creek banks, fence rows, or buffers along fields that have sandy type soils and it grows in most parts of Texas. It has a woody base that looks like a tree, but grows like a vine reaching up into other trees as far as 30 to 40 feet. A grape is considered a Liana, or a woody vine. This is a native plant which means that it is heat and drought tolerant. Native grapes are either male or female unlike grapes that are grown commercially. The flowers are very inconspicuous and hard to photograph. I had to do a web search to find a photo of the very small white flowers. It will bloom around April of each year and last until around June. The fruits start appearing in midsummer and are usually ready to pick around August.

One of the most distinguishing traits of the Mustang grape is the underside of the leaves are hairy, and are a distinctly different color than the tops. Don't be surprised if you find that the vine has leaves that are shaped differently. I have found locally that the rounded shape and the clubbed, deeply lobed shape are very common. If you are a wine connoisseur or manage for wildlife, this plant can be a benefit to you. It can be easily grown by seed, but the seeds need to be stratified (kept cold) at around 35-45 degrees Fahrenheit for about three months prior to planting. This can be done by placing the seeds in peat moss or a damp paper towel and placing them in the refrigerator. You can also transplant rootstalks. The best time to plant Mustang grapes are in late winter to early spring.

Keep in mind though that they can be aggressive, and will eventually choke out hardwoods and other plants that grow around them. The best way to manage grapes when they become invasive is to cut the limbs close to the ground and coat with a glyphosate.

Mustang grapes have a very interesting history in Texas, and this Liana has survived the ages. It will be here long after we are gone. I encourage all of you to get out and investigate the native plants in your area. You never know what you might find.



One of the most distinguishing traits of the Mustang grape is the underside of the leaves, upper right photo, are hairy, and are a distinctly different color than the tops. Don't be surprised if you find that the vine has leaves that are shaped differently. (Photo courtesy of Rebecca Svoboda, USDA-NRCS)

(Continued from page 1— Silverleaf Nightshade)

The glycoalkaloid solanine in the plant can make it toxic. Glycoalkaloid has two types of effects, including nervous effects that are salivation, labored breathing, drowsiness, progressive weakness, or paralysis. The second effect is gastrointestinal problems, including nausea, abdominal pain, vomiting and diarrhea. Affected animals should be moved as little as possible and should be fed good quality hay and water. Since silverleaf nightshade is unpalatable, problems usually occur after serious overgrazing.

The leaves and fruit are toxic at all stages of growth, and the ripe fruit is particularly toxic while sheep and goats are more resistant than cattle to the plant. The seed passes through the animal's digestive system in two weeks. If you are moving cattle from pasture that has silverleaf nightshade or any other weeds you should have a clean out period of two weeks before moving to clean areas. This lowers the probability of moving seeds of undesirable plants into new areas. With competition from my squash and other plants, I have not had to pull anymore silverleaf nightshade. If you do pull the plant make sure you wear gloves and get as much of the root as you can.



Photo Credit: Ricky Linex, USDA-NRCS

Silverleaf nightshade is a perennial plant, left, from the tomato family Solana-ceae. The bloom, right, shows bright yellow stamens in the center.



Photo Credit: Kelli McClelland, USDA-NRCS

(Continued from page 4 — Wooden Nickel Quiz)

Wooden Nickel Quiz—how well did you know your trees and shrubs in the Cross Timbers vegetational region?

The image shows 12 numbered cross-sections of tree trunks arranged in a 4x3 grid. Each section displays the characteristic growth rings and pith of a different tree species. The numbers 1 through 12 are printed in the center of each cross-section.

How Did You Score?

1. Skunkbush sumac
2. Red oak
3. Live oak
4. Mexican plum
5. Rusty blackhaw
6. Carolina buckthorn
7. Roughleaf dogwood
8. Blackjack oak
9. Red bud
10. Texas mulberry
11. Arizona black walnut
12. Flameleaf sumac

Keep reading The Reverchon Naturalist for more quizzes to help sharpen your identification skills throughout the many regions of North-Central Texas. (Photos courtesy of Ricky Linex, USDA-NRCS)

Switchgrass — A Grass of Many Talents!

*Story by Troy Reinke, NRCS District Conservationist
Albany, Texas*

Switchgrass, *Panicum virgatum*, is a native perennial tall bunch grass. It is endemic to a vast majority of the United States. It was the key component in much of the Tall Grass Prairie that stretched south through Central Texas' Blackland Prairie. It is often referred to as the one of the "Four Horseman of the Prairie". The other three being: Little bluestem, Indiangrass and Big bluestem. It was also a major grass component of the more arid grasslands of South, West and North Texas, generally growing in the deeper rangesites, and along the bottomland sites near creeks, streams and rivers. It loved the deep, rich, fertile soils of the Blackland Prairie, and grew there on all range sites, from the hills to the bottomlands. Early explorers wrote of the height as tall as their shoulders sitting on horseback. It's deep growing, fibrous roots helped to maintain soil stability, and provided the soil space to infiltrate and store rainfall for long periods of time.

The Native Americans in the areas knew how to manipulate the grass. They would burn it off to invigorate new, fresh growth so the buffalo would migrate back to the area. Early settlers learned how to use the cured grass for fuel. They would harvest the grass as a hay crop, then tightly pack and bundle the hay into small log size packages. This fuel would burn nicely in the stoves and fireplaces of the times. Along the bottomlands, it can be seen along the shores of creeks, streams and rivers. It can also be seen growing in the floodplains as well. Switchgrass is highly adapted to thrive along the rivers of Texas and their riparian areas as they flow towards the Gulf of Mexico. The hearty fibrous roots and thick bunches of stems and leaves provide tremendous conservation of the soil along those water courses during times of flooding. They also form the backbone of the riparian areas ability to filter sediment, debris, contaminants, and many other nasty things that tend to flow towards our creeks, rivers and lakes.

Today, modern man is using switchgrass to feed livestock, provide wildlife habitat, restore riparian function, power electric plants, provide stock for ethanol, and return native prairie back to its former glorious self. We use switchgrass to provide healthy, nutritious grazing for all classes of livestock. Its popularity for both monoculture and mixed pasture availability draws many producers to consider it for grass farming. It is very drought and flood tolerant, produces tonnages in excess of 8,000 pounds per acre, and can respond quickly to added soil amendments, either organic or inorganic. Switchgrass is also being used in many CRP and wildlife habitat restoration programs and projects across the state. From nesting to loafing to escape cover, switchgrass is being planted to provide these life requirements to birds, as well as mammals and other critters that crawl or slither. Other programs and projects have been using switchgrass to repair and restore and riparian function on many different water courses, and to protect the inland coastal areas from damaging and deadly storm surges in the Gulf of Mexico that come ashore.



Photo Credit: Troy Reinke, USDA-NRCS

The fibrous roots and thick bunches of stems and leaves, right, provide good conservation of the soil. The grass is also being used in many wildlife habitat restoration projects, left, across Texas.

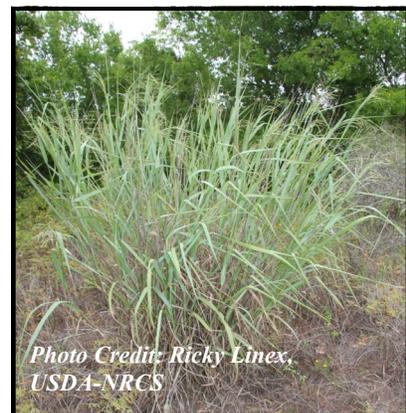


Photo Credit: Ricky Linex, USDA-NRCS

(Continued on page 10)

“Best group of deer management speakers I have seen scheduled in one continuum. Everyone who attends will get information they possibly have not heard before, it’s all about Texas Deer Study and years of experience from field studies by conservation professionals.” – Ricky Linex, NRCS-USDA

Texas Deer Study Group

Navigating the Deer Management Continuum



Life's better outside.®

Artwork courtesy of Mike Childress and TBGA



Caricatures by Mike Childress

DAY1 Registration begins at 7:00 a.m. & dinner begins at 6:00 p.m.

- * Reflections on Stewardship - Dr. Dan McBride
- * Fundamentals of Deer Management - Ty Bartoskowitz
- * Plant/Soil Responses to Fire and Drought - Steve Nelle
- * Range Management Considerations - Ricky Linex
- * Making a Feeding Program Work - Kent Mills
- * Economic, Ecologic, and Biologic Costs of Feeding - Dr. Dave Hewitt
- * Emerging Research Issues - Dr. Randy DeYoung
- * Wildlife Management Association/Coop Perspectives - Warren Blesh
- * Trail Cameras for Surveys and Scouting - Ruben Cantu
- * Status Report on Antler Regs - David Forrester
- * Genetic Management Strategies using Breeder Permits, DMP Facilities, and Traditional Culling - Warren Bluntzer, Dr. Charles DeYoung, Don Draeger
- * Public Perceptions of Deer Breeding - Brian Murphy
- * Market Sustainability of Deer Hunting - Greg Simons
- * Perspective on CWD - Dr. James Kroll, Dr. Bill Eikenhorst, Mitch Lockwood

DAY2

- Field Tour on Quail Ridge Ranch with plant i.d., range interpretations, and deer necropsy. (www.quailridgeranch.com)

Agenda subject to change

Date: April 18-19, 2013

Location: Somervell County Expo & Texas Amphitheatre—202 Bo Gibbs Blvd., Glen Rose, TX

Fees: *(Fees include meals and handout materials)*
 Pre Registration (Before 4/10) - \$75
 Late Registration (After 4/10) - \$100
No refunds after 4/10

Hotels

- Best Western Expo Center—254-897-4818
- Comfort Inn & Suites—254-898-8900
- Holiday Inn Express—254-898-9900
- La Quinta Inn & Suites—254-898-0697

Register online at
www.texas-wildlife.org

Name _____

Organization or ranch affiliation (if applicable) _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____

Mail form and payment to:
 TWA-TDSG
 3660 Thousand Oaks Dr., #126
 San Antonio, TX 78247
 Fax: 210-826-4933
 Pay by phone: 210-826-2904

Do you plan to attend Friday's Field Day at Quail Ridge Ranch?
 _____ YES _____ NO

Early (Before 4/10): \$75
 Late (After 4/10): \$100

Amount enclosed: _____
 Payment Form: Check Visa
 AmEx M/C
 Make Checks payable to: TWA-TDSG

Credit Card Number _____

Exp. date _____ Security code _____ Billing Zip _____

Signature _____

Email (print CLEARLY)
 For registration confirmation and all future communication regarding Texas Deer Study Group

For more information, contact
 Helen Holdsworth at hholdsworth@texas-wildlife.org

Purple Coneflower

*Story by Travis Swift, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician
Weatherford/Mineral Wells, Texas*

The purple coneflower has been known by a hand full of names such as: Narrow-Leaf coneflower, Echinacea, snakeroot, Black Sampson, and comb flower. *Echinacea angustifolia*; the scientific name, derives from the Greek word hedgehog, which is in reference to the spiny bracts of the disk flowers. This shiny specimen, which is part of the Sunflower family, is a perennial, native forb/herb of the lower 48 states and Canada. It has been known to grow up to 3 feet in height. The leaves are hairy, 3-veined and alternate along an erect, straight or branched hairy stem. Tea made from the leaves has become a remedy for sore mouths and gums, mumps and measles.

The purple coneflower was, and still is the most widely used medicinal plant of the Plains Indians. The Cheyenne, Dakota, Fox, Omaha, and Teton Sioux; just to name a few, used different parts of the plant for a variety of ailments. These included a painkiller for the common cold to snake bites and burns. The Lakota and Ponca tribes sometimes used the seed heads to comb their hair (comb flower). Also, the smoke from burning coneflower was used to treat distemper in horses by the Ponca, Dakota, Pawnee and Winnebago tribes. Early settlers in Oklahoma used the root as an aid in nearly every kind of sickness. If a cow or horse did not eat well, they would administer Echinacea in its feed.

Today, many physicians use Echinacea as an herbal remedy, primarily as an immuno-stimulant. Research has shown that the purple coneflower produces an anti-inflammatory effect, and has therapeutic value in urology, gynecology, internal medicine and dermatology.

The purple coneflower is often grown simply for its ornamental value, especially for its showy flowers. Bright pink, purple or white petals are produced during blooming season, which is from May to September. Native *Echinacea* species are dwindling in the wild due to loss of habitat and over-harvesting. It is threatened on one hand by conversion of native habitat. On the other hand this species is threatened by heavy harvesting to serve the herbal pharmaceutical industry.

The purple coneflower is very adaptable to well drained, clay-loam to sandy soils. Its taproot can grow to 5-8 feet in length, allowing the plant to survive periods of drought. The coneflower also tends to be decreasing in its native habitat, but often does well when planted and cultivated.



Photos courtesy of Travis Swift, USDA-NRCS

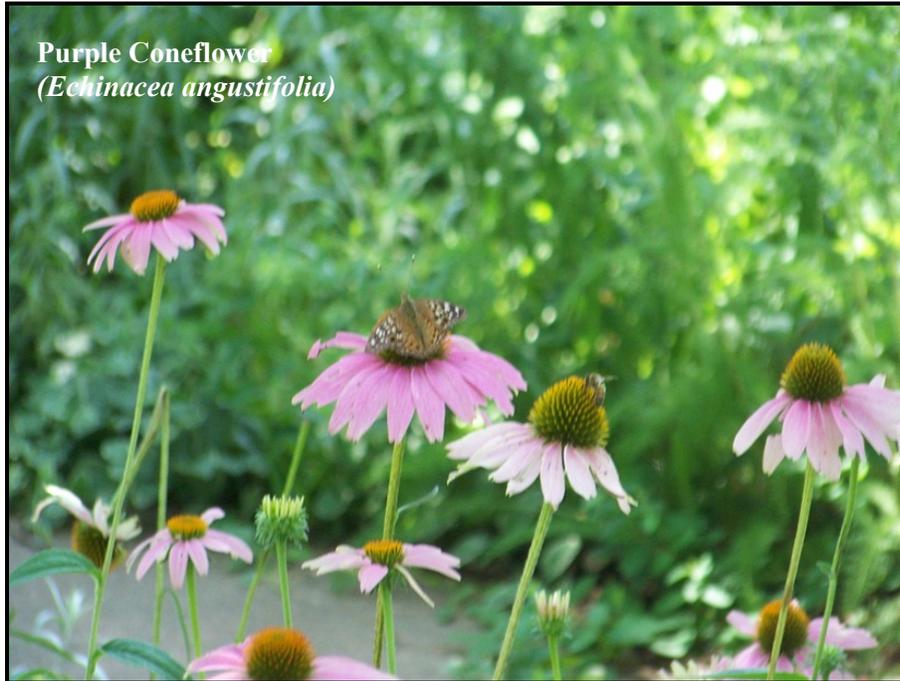


Purple Cornflower
(*Echinacea angustifolia*)

Purple coneflower in its native habitat, left, growing in Parker County, Texas, in 2012. The colorful plant, above, has many ornamental uses also. (Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9—Purple Coneflower)

Purple coneflower is palatable and eaten by all classes of livestock, deer and antelope. Some insects that young quail eat are attracted to the flower. The flower is a good pollen attractant for butterflies and native bees, as well as hummingbirds enjoy its nectar as pollinators. The purple coneflower is a very attractive specimen of nature. With proper management, its beauty and value shall remain for generations to come.



Purple Coneflower
(Echinacea angustifolia)

The Purple coneflower is a valuable source of pollen for butterflies and native bees, left, as well as hummingbirds that enjoy getting the nectar from this colorful flower and pollinate other plants. (Photo Credit: Travis Swift, USDA-NRCS)

(Continued from page 7—Switchgrass, A Grass of Many Talents)

Switchgrass is also being harvested to provide supplemental fuel sources for our coal fired electric power plants. Switchgrass has been shown to contain enough BTU's (British Thermal Units) to be mixed with coal up to a predetermined percent, depending on the quality of coal being used. Some companies are looking at developing plants that will burn 100 percent Switchgrass derived fuels.

Along those same lines, companies are developing methods to derive ethanol from it so we can also power our cars, decreasing our dependency on fossil fuel and foreign oil imports. It is also the kingpin grass for many die-hard, tall grass prairie restoration experts. Everyone from the researcher to the guy in the backyard, all want it to be the bright spot in their effort to recreate Mother Nature's Tall Grass Prairies and her "Four Horsemen".



Photo Credit: Troy Reinke, USDA-NRCS

Switchgrass, above, is being harvested to provide supplemental fuel sources for coal powered power plants.

Seeds: The Most Important Part of the Plant

Story by Jim Stanley

Texas Master Naturalist and Author: Hill Country Landowner's Guide

Kerrville, Texas

The amazing profusion of wildflowers, in terms of both abundance and diversity of species, we saw in the spring of 2012 was even more striking coming after the severe drought of 2011. What we were experiencing in 2012 was an abundance of growth from seeds that were at least two years old as there was very little seed production in 2011. And when we see some plants in great density cover large areas where we have never seen them before, we have to marvel at when these seeds were produced, how they got distributed, and how they survived until now.

It is true that under certain conditions truly ancient seeds have been discovered in dry caves and tombs that have been found to be viable hundreds or even thousands of years later. Those are of course extreme examples, but it is not unusual to observe grasses or forbs sprouting in areas where the seeds must have been several years old. Considering the amount of genetic material, food and energy reserves stored in those tiny seeds, you have to marvel at how truly amazing Mother Nature is.

It also means, however, that if we want to have this kind of bounty in the future, we should do whatever we can to make sure that every year's seeds are allowed to mature and survive. In order for seed production to result in successful germination, several things must happen. First, the flower has to be pollinated otherwise the seed will not be fertile. Secondly, the seed must stay on the plant until it is mature. Then the seeds must be distributed around to different locations. Finally, the seed must come in contact with mineral soil and survive without being eaten by birds or insects, or rotting, until conditions are right for germination.

There is not much that we can do about the latter steps, but we can have some influence on the early steps. For those many species of flowers that require pollination by insects, we can refrain from using excessive insecticides so that there will be plenty of insects around to do the work. Some plants can be pollinated by hummingbirds and other animals.

Moreover, we can refrain from mowing or cutting off seed heads before the seeds are mature, but we don't always know how long that takes. Some of the early-blooming plants such as bluebonnets and Texas wintergrass may about finished blooming by early May, and have set seed, but the seeds are not mature yet. So the safest thing to do is to let the seeds mature on the plant until they appear to be ready to fall off naturally. For many wildflowers, this may mean late in the year when the leaves of the plant are turning brown and falling off, which may be later than many people are willing to tolerate. But the longer the seeds stay on the plant, the greater probability that the seeds will be mature. Furthermore, the longer you leave the plant unmowed or uncut, the greater chance birds or other small animals will harvest the seeds for you and, best of all, distribute them widely.

Of course, if you want to distribute seeds over certain areas to get more of the plant where you want it, the most successful way to do it is to watch the seed head and when the seed structures appear to readily come off, you can gently pull them off and then scatter the seeds where you wish. This works well with grasses as well as most wildflowers. When you are scattering seeds, it is important to get the seeds to make direct contact with mineral soil (by putting them on bare soil and stepping on them), not just throwing them onto dried leaves, as the latter will just rot or be eaten.

We certainly appreciated the greenery and color in 2012 all the more because of the contrast with 2011. The extremes of those two years just illustrate how variable Mother Nature can be. She is always interesting and never boring.

Easy to Build Leaf Press on a Budget

*Story by Jeff Genung
Capital Master Naturalist Group
Austin, Texas*

A leaf press is a must have for any serious student of plants. Whether you are interested in trees, smaller plants, or grasses, a leaf press can assist in carrying specimens out of the jungle and back to your lab, for your own herbarium, or just as beautifully pressed plants.

Leaf presses can be made in any size but the most useful size is 12x18 inches. This size allows full sheets of herbarium paper to be in the press or just common sized paper 11x17 inches. Cardboard and chipboard can also be purchased in a 12x18 size. This size also allows us to build a press very easily with just a few tools or even with no tools if your local home lumber center will let you cut some wood.

Many home centers will cut plywood for you and some will also have a station to cut molding. If not, you can have it cut at a frame shop or cut it yourself with just a small saw and a mitre box. This simple press can be made with very little effort and for well under an estimated \$20.

PARTS LIST:

¼ inch plywood or 5mm Luann wood: 2 pieces cut to 12x18
¾ inch quarter round molding: 4 pieces 18 inches long, cut from one 6-foot piece
¾ inch square wood: 4 pieces 18 inches long and 8 pieces approximately 9 inches long
glue (wood glue)
sandpaper
nylon straps and plastic hardware

CONSTRUCTION:

Many of the measurements given here will not be exact on your press. So, the main objective should be to make the front and back as close to the same size as possible. For the press pictured, I used ¾ x ½ inch molding that can usually be found in your local area.

Thin ¼-inch plywood or thin wood called Luann, which comes in thicknesses of about 5 mm, is the best bet for the upper and lower parts of the press. Most home improvement stores will sell this in 2-foot squares. Take one of the squares and have them make 2 cuts for you. The first cut should take about 6 inches off one side to make a 24x18 piece of wood, and then the second cut should cut this piece in half to make 2 pieces 12x18. Ask them to make these 2 pieces as close to the same size as possible, as they will form your upper and lower parts of the press.

Then cut 4 pieces of quarter round molding 18 inches long, or as long as the long edge of your plywood. One 6-foot piece will be perfect for this. Also cut 4 pieces of ¾-square wood the same length. These will be for each side of the upper and lower pieces of the press. Set these on the plywood and measure between them the space should be about 9 inches. Cut 4 pieces of this length for each piece of plywood, 4 for the top and 4 for the bottom.

Therefore, it is better for these to be cut at around 1/16 to 1/8 inch too short rather than too long. If the store has 3-foot long pieces of this wood, you will be able to get 2 of the long pieces or 4 of the short pieces out of each length of wood. Glue everything together and use the sandpaper to smooth any rough edges. The straps should wrap around the press and have enough length to grab and tighten. A good choice is 1 ½-inch nylon web straps with plastic slide hardware to tighten everything together. If you don't have access to nylon straps, even a pair of belts with extra holes punched will work.